MONATLICHER INFORMATIONSBRIEF ÜBER EVANGELISATION

A MONTHLY LETTER ABOUT EVANGELISM

LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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The author of the following letter is Mr. Baden Hickman, a staff reporter on the Manchester Evening News (England), and a member of the team which is at work on the project about which he writes.

NEWSPAPER EVANGELISM

The Report of the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion contained the following paragraph:

> The Church also should make the fullest possible use of literature in its approach to the minds and souls of men. There is urgent need for newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets in simple and popular idiom, designed to commend Christianity to those outside the Church. Such literature should supply a Christian commentary on life in general and current events in particular.

Twelve months ago in the heart of one of Europe's biggest and most powerful single concentrations of industry - the vast, multi-million pound Trafford Park area, near Manchester, England - a new newspaper entered the workers' homes. The newcomer was the same tabloid size as the newspaper with the world's largest circulation.

The four-page paper took as its slick but sincere slogan the bold claim to be "A Christian voice in Industry", and then deliberately published many points of view as well. And later, between artisans' articles from religious leaders and factory hands, came bold page one pictures of singing and sporting stars and a pretty pin-up.

Such was the bold beginning of The Leader, a pioneering evangelistic enterprise which stepped out (expecting at the outset the stricter conservatives' brickbats) to set men and women of industry thinking and talking by presenting news and Christian comment on current issues.

As the expanding paper's life-blood circulation has steadily increased from the first 1,000 to one month's 6,000 copies, the gap between the more numerous conventional and rarely controversial publications has only widened. Today it is described as Britain's church-factory newspaper.

REFERAT FÜR EVANGELISATION · STUDIENABTEILUNG · OEKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN

DEPARTMENT ON EVANGELISM · DIVISION OF STUDIES · WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

DÉPARTEMENT D'ÉVANGÉLISATION · DIVISION DES ÉTUDES · CONSEIL ŒCUMÉNIQUE DES ÉGLISES

The success story of The Leader, whose circulation soon swept over the industrial estate's boundaries to be read in factories, offices and colleges in many different parts of Britain and overseas, is an exciting example of true team work between a clergyman and laity skilled in their own trades.

The minister who turned his study into an editor's room ("open all hours") at a time when mighty papers were dying overnight, is the Rev. Michael Z. Brooke, the industrial chaplain to the Bishop of Manchester (the Rt. Rev. W.D.L. Greer) and rector of the estate's parish church of St. Cuthbert. He was a war-time coal miner.

His newspaper "staff" are professional reporters, sub-editors, a photographer and an artist from leading Manchester provincial and national newspapers; men of commerce, city typists and other ministers. They are busy folk; they are of different denominations, sometimes of none. But all share the same basic ideal as the editor, to bring Church and industry closer together.

As their first birthday number trimphantly declares: "As creation is achieved at the work-bench, in the laboratory or in the boardroom, so, too, The Leader became a reality from the ideas of men inspired by faith and by confidence in their own abilities.

"Soon its message, moulded by clergymen and journalists, was saluted by bishops in their palaces and working men at their benches."

Some of the greatest lessons of newspaper production - to be a success you must have business organisation, brave independence and a bubbling, invigorating freshness - were soon learnt. The editorial team meets twice a month in the local Y.M.C.A., to thrash out contents, pictures, future projects and special circulation-boosting ideas, and the management side (finance, policy, development and routine business practices) at the editor's home.

The round-table editorial gatherings, which normally take place during the tea time break when the main shifts of the daily morning and evening papers are changing over, strive continually to see that the balance between secular news and views and religious items is maintained.

Take a typical month's issue. There is a soccer and sports round-up by a widely-read columnist, a televions and radio review feature ("Lad from the factory outshone the TV stars" is one headline), as well as the two regular serious articles (one on a theological and one on a social issue) crisply written, to be as "contemporary" as the piano advertisement on the same page.

Items of international church news balance those from Britain's powerful Trades Union Congress. Direct news channels have now been established with the Geneva-based Ecumenical Press Service of the World Council of Churches and with the Press office of the T.U.C. And with a bishop's views on nuclear war there comes a rector's write-up on "pop" records. Besides this, copy comes in from many social and industrial organisations, individual firms and press agencies (notably the Westbourne Press Bureau, London).

This is what the editor has replied to those who criticise the contents of his newspaper. "The Leader is a Christian paper. The title symbolises that Christians should be opinion-formers and not merely camp-followers.

The paper's heart is big enough to find room for every view: Protestant, Catholic, Atheist, Jew, Mohammedan, Labour, Conservative, Liberal and Communist."

The result of what is to some "revolutionary policy", has been startling at times. The first year's international mailbag - there have been letters from nine nations - has brought words of encouragement from many sources.

From the original Trafford Park issue, a new national edition (which means entirely different news on one page) is now on sale, together with a further localised edition on a new housing estate in Lancashire. Other localised editions which will replace or supplement parish magazines are now pending elsewhere. Special supplements scheduled for 1959 include one in support of Christian Aid Week. Manchester's Council of Churches has already ordered 5,000 copies of this number.

All of which means that in one of the most highly competitive and skilled trades, Britain's bustling newspaper business, a group of dedicated men are holding their own (despite a depressing debit bank balance) in producing a bright monthly paper to help bridge the gap between pulpit and pavement. One critic wrote: "...you literally stink". The editor told his "staff": "That proves we are being read!" And the work went on.

A last word from the editor: "Thanks to the hard work of our skilled team, we always have far more material than we can publish. We are urgently seeking the circulation and resources which will carry a larger product. We have always set ourselves to make ecumenical news available to a wider public and will include more of this when we can afford the extra pages. One of the aims of The Leader is to be popular and yet avoid the triviality of so much religious publicity; we couple with this the desire to promote "dialogue". We started The Leader with a view to providing a tool for those interested in industrial contacts. Now that we have got through the experimental stage, we seek wider usefulness.

Copies of The Leader can be obtained from The Leader (circulation department), 21, Barnfield, Urmston, Manchester, England.